

How to thrive in an introverted / extroverted workplace

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Do you identify as an introvert or an extrovert? Credit: Wildhairmedia.com

Personality is defined as "the combination of characteristics or qualities that form an individual's unique character" (Psychology Today).

Understanding one's personality type is crucial, not only in adapting to a workplace environment, but also selecting a workplace to be a member of in the first place. One of the most common examples of personalities comes down to extroversion and introversion. Although these may be widely used terms, I've noticed in my experience that relatively few people actually understand what encompasses an introvert or an extrovert, and what essentially makes them different. If you are one of those individuals who find the subject to be perplexing (or just have a general interest), please read on!

Q: What is the difference between an Introvert and

an Extrovert?

A: Introvert: Not surprisingly, introverts are re-energized by having "alone time". Even when working with small groups of people, they can be quickly overwhelmed by unfamiliar situations or surroundings. Depending on the situation, a large crowd of people can be an instant red flag to an introvert. When it comes to work, introverts prefer to concentrate on one task at a time, and observe a situation (or group of people) in advance, before jumping in.

Careers that promote the strengths of introverts include scientists, writers, and artists. Famous examples of introverts include actress Julia Roberts, actor Clint Eastwood, host David Letterman, and author J.K. Rowling.

A: Extrovert: Often referred to as "social butterflies", extroverts make a living through social stimulation. They focus on elements of the external environment (in contrast to an introvert's inner mental realm), such as the people on activities around them. Extroverts thrive in active, fast-paced jobs, such as sales, teaching, and politics, where skills such as adaptability, problem-solving, and quick decision-making are critical. Extroverts learn firsthand by doing, and prefer to talk through ideas and solutions. Multitasking is an extrovert's bread and butter.

Famous examples of extroverts include Oprah Winfrey, President Barack Obama, actor Tom Hanks, and former NBA player Michael Jordan.

Q: Are there misconceptions regarding Introverts or Extroverts?

A: Indeed! For instance, shyness is a trait commonly used to describe

introverts. Firstly, both introverts and extroverts can be shy. Shyness is essentially a feeling of uneasiness or anxiety experienced in social situations. Here's the key difference between shyness and introversion: while introverts prefer less social stimulation, shy people often desire social interaction, yet avoid it for fear of being rejected or criticized. Boom! Introverts rejoice!

A misconception involving extroversion is that all extroverts are loud, annoying, and talk too much. While this may be true for some individuals, not all extroverts are such. Extroverts simply prefer to think out loud, whereas an introvert may do more internal thinking before speaking—just a style difference.

There are several other misunderstandings when defining introversion and extroversion, which brings me to my next point....

To be a successful employee, it is crucial to understand not only yourself, but also the personalities of those around you in the workplace. Issues can arise when introverts and extroverts interact. Introverts may see extroverts as bossy, while an extrovert may see an introvert as shy or withdrawn. Whether an introvert or extrovert, here's some advice that may help you understand what is going on across the fence:

What extroverts should know about their introverted colleagues:

1. If we need alone time, it is not because we don't like you, rather because we need it—don't take that as a personal insult.
2. If you want to hear our opinion, please be patient. We aren't in a rush to speak up—we know we will have our turn eventually.
3. We are not lonely people, but we are choosy about who we associate ourselves with. If you try to turn us into extroverts, you will not be one of those people!

What introverts should know about their extroverted colleagues:

1. If we try to get you to loosen up, we aren't doing so to annoy you. Honestly, we mean well.
2. If you are struggling with small talk, we can help with that—it is a useful skill, whether you like it or not.
3. We are not all the same—just like [introverts](#). There are extroverts who have a quiet side too—you just have to keep an open mind.

Provided by Northeastern University

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